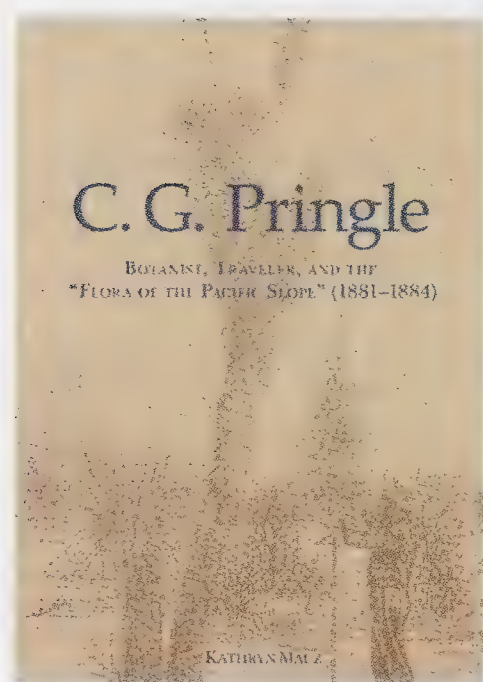


Review



C. G. Pringle: Botanist, Traveler, and the "Flora of the Pacific Slope" (1881–1884) by K. MAUZ. 2018. Memoirs of The New York Botanical Garden, Volume 120, Heritage Series, Number 3, NYBG Press, Bronx, NY. 760 pp. ISBN:978-0-89327-556-3 (hardcover). Price: \$129.99.

Today, Cyrus Guernsey Pringle is best known to botany as the premier plant explorer of northern Mexico in the age of the railroad, when travel in the West became exponentially easier than it had been before. Years-long overland discovery expeditions of the early 19th century became season-long or only year-long collecting trips when the transcontinental railroads were complete, enabling much more efficient work. Now, a botanist could work alone and time his trips to coincide with the proper season to locate plants in flower or in fruit, swiftly moving as needed from station to station.

This book tells the story of the first plant explorer to take full advantage of this new opportunity in America. It comprises two main sections: a forensic travelogue of Pringle's early travels during an important phase of American botany and a reference catalogue of the plant collections made on these travels. It covers a short period, only four years, of Pringle's explorations when he was first collecting in the American West and first learning its flora prior to his more than two decades of work in Mexico.

The Mexican work was documented by Davis (1936), relying on Pringle's field books but, unfortunately, Pringle did not maintain a field diary of these earlier efforts. The current volume fills out the record admirably.

Such was the opportunity afforded to Pringle in the early 1880s when he was commissioned by C. S. Sargent, director of the Arnold Arboretum, to collect information on the trees of western forests for the 10th US Census (the resulting Report was published in 1884) and at the same time to collect samples of tree logs for the Jesup Collection of North American Woods, a privately funded effort promoted by the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Brainerd (1911) noted that Pringle's remit also included making general collections for Asa Gray, eminent botanist at Harvard University, and Mauz here notes several other prominent botanists for whom Pringle made collections. As was common in those times when the world was building large

herbaria and the West was new, Pringle also supported his own work by selling duplicate sets of each season's collecting. Today, his specimens are found in many important herbaria and continue to inform systematics.

A native and resident of Charlotte, near Burlington, Vermont, Pringle had a successful early career in agriculture and horticulture. Family circumstances interrupted formal study at the University of Vermont, but he was very bright and found an extensive circle of acquaintances in the horticultural world, the University, and the Vermont Department of Agriculture. He ran a successful nursery, was a plant breeder achieving success and a measure of fame with potatoes, wheat, and oats, and was a student of the local flora. In the mid-1870s, he became enamored of plant exploration and collecting, first at the request of botanical correspondents who wanted specimens of some of Vermont's rarer plants. Writing many years later (Pringle 1897), he recalled, "The times yielded me an opportunity and I was ready to grasp it, was fitted by possession of leisure and strength and taste of absorbing passion to follow out the tasks set me. . . . So, I was sent out on quests for these treasures." He rather quickly exhausted local opportunities, especially among the ferns, in Vermont, the St. Lawrence Valley, the Saguenay, and northern Maine. These early parts of his life are quickly covered in Chapters 1 and 2, Introduction and Prelude (1875–1881).

Thus, Pringle was both ready and eager to undertake the western commissions when offered. His four years of trips to the "Pacific Slope" (i.e., west of the Continental Divide) in Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington—and two short side trips to Mexico—form the travelogue portion of Mauz's book (Chapters 3–9). This section supplies the diary that Pringle never wrote. His itineraries are recovered from correspondence, various paper trails such as expense accounts, receipts, and hotel registers and, most importantly, the plant specimens that he carefully collected and labeled. It is fortunate for the historian that Pringle, more than any other early collector, produced labels that went at least somewhat beyond the "less is more" mindset of earlier collectors. Even though the label data still remain sparse, Mauz is able to recapture Pringle's day-to-day movements, thus putting the specimens into far more context than they would otherwise be. With over 2700 collections, there is a wealth of data supporting this account.

Not that Pringle's work, made efficient in comparison to earlier times, was easy. He was healthy and vigorous, but Pringle was over 40 when this work began. The railroads were swift, but travel into the mountains and canyons still required horses and

carriages (hired or purchased) and plenty of travel on foot. The collecting itself was strenuous, especially obtaining the sections of logs, heavy and cumbersome to prepare and transport, and the careful collection, pressing, and care of the many specimens of trees, shrubs, and herbs, with multiple duplicates, often in adverse weather conditions. But it is evident that Pringle much enjoyed the work, that he was very knowledgeable about the flora, and that he was, indeed, the right person for the job. The general reader may feel that there are a few too many (if entirely logical) speculations (e.g., he “would have seen” such and such a plant, or “may have arrived at” such and such a place), but Mauz does her best to make the travelogue flow smoothly. Although it would be wonderful to have Pringle’s own record and impressions of the particularities of these trips, Mauz’s tracing of the itineraries and telling of the plants makes engaging reading.

Interwoven through the travel narrative are accounts, often supported by lengthy quotations from correspondence, of Pringle’s interactions with his employers concerning his progress, with other botanists such as Asa Gray at Harvard, George Engelmann in St Louis, and Charles Parry in California, concerning the plants, and with other collectors working in the region. Some of these other workers were rivals. As has happened many times in botanical history, they competed to be the “first to find” a new species. For example, John Lemmon scooped Pringle on *Woodsia cochisensis* Windham in the Santa Catalina mountains of Arizona, causing Pringle some consternation. In the end, however, Pringle himself discovered so many plant species new to science, including on these early trips—e.g. the eponymous *Cheilanthes pringlei* (now *Myriopteris pringlei* (Davenp.) Grusz & Windham), *Poa pringlei* Scribn. ex Vasey, *Agave pringlei* (now *Agave deserti* var. *pringlei* (Baker) W.C.Hodgs. & Reveal), *Pachycereus pringlei* Britton & Rose, and *Arctostaphylos pringlei* Parry—that he saw the rivalries as pointless, but the discoveries as important.

The extensively quoted correspondence also gives us insight into Pringle’s personality and character. His modesty, kindness, and earnestness were well known to others during his lifetime and upon his death extensively praised by his Vermont colleague, Middlebury College President Ezra Brainerd (Brainerd 1911). Most readers will be aware of Pringle’s reputation as a conscientious objector to service in the Civil War, which is treated briefly in Chapter 1. He was detained in military prison for several months and finally released only on the direct order of President Lincoln. His diary of this experience, first published after his death (Pringle 1913), reveals a man of deeply held beliefs and a serene attitude toward life. Thus, he was able to endure the difficulties of life on the trail and any antagonisms encountered.

However, one is a little surprised to read Engelmann’s description of him in a letter to Asa Gray (quoted on p. 110) as “that staid Yankee,” with

the hint of unimaginative propriety and dull devotion to duty that phrase can imply. One has not previously had the impression of Pringle as “staid” because we in Vermont know of his real enthusiasm (masked by shyness), as witnessed by Vermont botanist W. W. Eggleston’s account of their first meeting—both on foot, they passed on the road near Pringle’s home without greeting, neither wanting to speak first although both suspected who the other was—followed by a strenuous field trip through Vermont hills and bogs (Eggleston 1912).

One happily confirms that impression of Pringle by learning here of his downright enthusiasm for photography, learned alongside botanist and fern specialist George E. Davenport in these years, and resulting in well composed and well executed photographs of his travels and his plants, about a dozen of which are included in the volume and which add immeasurably to it. These photographs are a remarkable part of the record.

In the end, we see that Pringle was not only the Prince of Collectors, as Gray so famously styled him, but also a good photographer, and, taking into account his contributions to the Report of the 10th US Census (not reproduced by Mauz, but summarized on p. 19), evidently a good observer and keen reporter. That he did not describe species or write extensively about his plants and travels, a fact often remarked, is no mark against him; he was an excellent botanist, and he probably had more fun than most.

Following the narrative are several appendices that are equally as informative as the text itself: lists of the logs collected for the Jesup Collection, a long list of Pringle’s plants sorted by locality (county-level and municipal level), a complete catalogue of label data for all of the collections that constituted Pringle’s “Flora of the Pacific Slope,” and a short list of the specimens collected during his trips that were not part of the “Flora.” Last and handiest of all to one reading the travelogue, Appendix E is an historical atlas of Pringle’s collecting localities during this period, with an overall map and several regional maps, all of the period. There is hardly anything more one could wish for in this book, but on our very short list would be at least one modern map of Pringle’s localities and itineraries, and that this would be inserted up front for easier reference. Perhaps such a map might have replaced the front or back endpaper. Extensive notes (with the referenced text pages listed at the top of each page of notes—a system to be widely recommended) follow, many worth reading stand-alone, especially the short biographies. Numerous references and two indices (to people and place names, and to plants) round out the volume.

Regarding the book itself, the cover is pleasing, with a gold-embossed frond of *Myriopteris pringlei* on the cover (the same image used at chapter headings and gold-embossed title on the spine) and has a well-designed dust jacket. The layout and typography are nicely handled, with long quotes set

off in paragraphs slightly narrower than the main text and fully justified (the main text is only left-justified). Printed on coated, archival paper, it is quite hefty, as suits the dignity of its subject.

—ART GILMAN AND DAVID BARRINGTON. The Pringle Herbarium, Jeffords Hall 305, 63 Carrigan Drive, Burlington, VT 05405

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